

## BOOK REVIEW

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## Migrants: making it in the melting pot

*Securing the Future: U.S. Immigrant Integration Policy: A Reader.* Edited by Michael Fix, Washington, DC. Migration Policy Institute, 2007, 192 pp., \$22.68 /paperback.

Despite the enforcement of stricter immigration laws in the last decade, the United States remains a top destination for migrants in the 21st century. Together with other factors, the recent national crises of the Great Recession, stagnant wages, and increased threat of terrorist attacks, however, have exacerbated an already delicate nature of the immigration debate. Whereas in the past the discussion delved mostly into whether the United States should impose new restrictions on immigrants or adopt a more laissez-faire approach, the debate in the 21st century has been much more focused on border control and undocumented immigrants. As a result, fewer studies have been conducted about how well immigrants are actually *integrating* into American society, leading one to question, “What exactly does integrating immigrants in the 21st century entail?” and “To what extent should the United States push this agenda?”

*Securing the Future: U.S. Immigrant Integration Policy: A Reader*, 10 essays written and compiled by Editor-in-Chief Michael Fix, attempts to answer those and other questions. The book is logically divided into an introduction and three parts: (1) “Defining the integration vision,” (2) “The current state of rights and services,” and (3) “Key policy issues.” In the introduction, Doris Meissner, senior fellow at the Migration Policy Institute, refers to the then (2007) state of U.S. immigrant integration policy as “skeletal, ad hoc, and under-funded.” Following Meissner’s brief introduction, Michael Fix provides an overview of the book in its first essay, emphasizing the importance of the issue in contrast to the time invested in it. Both pieces encourage the reader to consider immigrant integration not simply as an *option*, but a *need*, for America to grow and to maintain international competitiveness. And both call for more comprehensive immigrant integration policies in education, health care, and welfare, themes which are amplified in the essays that follow.

### Part 1: Defining the integration vision

This section introduces historical trends in integration and encourages the reader to ponder whether current policies help, hinder, or even create barriers to successful immigrant integration. In his introductory overview, Michael Fix defines successful integration as “a two-way process that involves change on the part not just of immigrants but members of the receiving community.” Further, “Successful integration builds communities that are stronger economically and more inclusive socially and culturally.” However, he also offers opposing views in the book, such as that expressed in Tamar Jacoby’s essay “Immigrant Integration—The American Experience.” Jacoby argues that U.S. integration policies should focus on the work immigrants can provide rather than any federal aid to which they may be entitled. Her essay poses the questions “How much is too much federal aid?” and “Should immigrants even be allowed to take part in receiving welfare distribution?” Jacoby agrees that immigrants are entitled to assistance such as access to education and the right to work, but maintains that successful integration occurs only when immigrants and government meet halfway. In her opinion, the foreign born must first prove a willingness to do the work necessary to create a better life for themselves. Only then should government provide assistance to the extent possible. Jacoby’s essay

serves as an excellent starting point for a more thorough discussion and segues nicely into the essays that follow.

Roger Waldinger and Renee Reichl's "Today's Second Generation: Getting Ahead or Falling Behind?" scrutinizes the hardships immigrants face once they arrive in America. The authors compare and contrast first-generation (the foreign born), second-generation (those born in the United States to at least one foreign-born parent), and third-generation immigrants (those born in the United States to parents also born in the United States) in regard to quality of life. Using BLS Current Population Survey (CPS) data, Waldinger and Reichl disaggregate the immigrant population by generation and origin (race and ethnicity); generation and age group ("youth," "young adult," and "adult"); age group and educational attainment; and employed adults by generation, origin, and gender. They find that, with the exception of first- and second-generation Asians, who performed as well as the native born on many indicators, opportunities for most first-generation immigrants are severely limited. First-generation Mexican Americans, in particular, are more likely to start and remain in low-skilled occupations. Second-generation Mexican Americans fare much better than their parents in terms of quality of life, however, and the authors find no correlation between any of race, ethnicity, or gender and educational attainment among other second- and third-generation immigrants. Across the spectrum, school enrollment and graduation rates improve dramatically with each successive generation.

## **Part 2: The current state of rights and services**

The title of this part of the book could be considered misleading, because some of the essays within it touch on other topics. For example, Donald Kerwin's "Immigrant Rights, Integration, and the Common Good" focuses on tying the topic of immigrant integration to basic human rights rather than discussing the limitations and constraints of federal programs and services. Kerwin suggests that extending both "rights" (defined as that which entails "civic responsibilities" and expands the "common good") and "membership privileges/attributes/benefits" to immigrants accelerates integration. He examines the historical background and legal framework surrounding immigration, delves into Supreme Court cases addressing limitations on their rights encountered by immigrants since 1886, and concludes, "Noncitizens have scant constitutional rights in immigration matters." Although the court cases differ, one similarity is ubiquitous: Congress' ability and willingness to exercise "plenary authority to make laws" that affect immigrants. Kerwin's essay thus challenges the reader to question the *context* of "rights." Specifically, what rights do immigrants really have if Congress has the authority to alter them whenever it deems necessary? Per Kerwin, successful immigrant integration policy should secure "rights" not only in a way that would "allow immigrants to integrate," but in a way that is "common to all of us." The federal cases he cites call to mind Chief Justice John Marshall's statement in the landmark case of *Marbury vs. Madison*:

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*The distinction between a government with limited and unlimited powers is abolished, if those limits do not confine the persons on whom they are imposed, and if acts prohibited and acts allowed, are of equal obligation....The Constitution is either superior paramount law, unchangeable by ordinary means, or alterable when the legislature shall please to alter it.*

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Limitations to immigrant rights are further analyzed in the essay by Julia Gelatt and Fix, “Federal Spending on Immigrant Families’ Integration.” In it, the authors explore major federal programs targeting immigrants (e.g., The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). Gelatt and Fix determine that “targeted federal integration programs form a fragmentary system of support for immigrant families in U.S. communities” and point out that many federal programs either have declined in funding over the years or have simply “failed to keep pace with the

growing flows of new immigrants.”

### **Part 3: Key policy issues**

Leighton Ku and Demetrios Papademetriou’s “Access to Health Care and Health Insurance: Immigrants and Immigration Reform” opens the discussion of policy issues. Its authors analyze CPS data and find the number of noncitizen immigrants without health care to be triple the number of uninsured U.S.-born citizens, regardless of income. Ku and Papademetriou discuss both private health insurance limitations that immigrants face and the lack of access to public health care.

Focusing mainly on the realm of education, the three essays that follow address other key policy issues: Amy Beeler and Julie Murray’s “Improving Immigrant Workers’ Economic Prospects: A Review of the Literature” examines the nonexistence of a “formal public system” in the United States that would allow for the verification of one’s education in another country and the conversion of the courses taken to equivalent U.S. courses; “Educating the Children of Immigrants,” by Julie Murray, Jeanne Batalova, and Michael Fix, discusses the increased legislative demands that have built up over time—and the inadequate funding provided to satisfy them—to better accommodate students with limited English proficiency; and Deborah Garvey’s “Designing an Impact Aid Program for Immigrant Settlement” sheds light on the absence of policy measures to alleviate the burden faced by state and local governments with the highest influx of immigrants.

Thus, the last part of the book discusses the ongoing challenges immigrants face, such as the need to build their skills through adequate training, the need to promote entrepreneurship, and opportunities lost because of limited English proficiency. Policy recommendations include providing immigrants with affordable access to health care, making funding available for more quality research on how to best train immigrant workers, and offering aid packages to state and local governments with a heavy concentration of immigrants.

This book was written in 2007. Flash forward to 2015, and some individuals feel that health care for immigrants, for one, has found a solution: President Obama’s Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) of 2010. The ACA provides affordable health care to all who reside in the United States, regardless of citizenship status. Education, another key policy issue discussed in the last part of the book, has also seen action: the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Act of 2012. Among other immigrant-oriented legislation, the act gives a segment of the undocumented immigrant population the opportunity to remain in the country without fear of deportation, allows immigrants to apply for work permits, and increases opportunities for economic and social incorporation. In addition, a number of states now grant in-state tuition to immigrants regardless of legal residence. There has also been legislation in the area of immigrants’ right to work: in November 2014, President Obama signed an

executive order granting work permits for millions of undocumented immigrants, providing a pathway for them to obtain citizenship. Although some of the contributions in Part 3 of the book are of limited value because of changes that have occurred since 2007, they encourage the reader to reflect on progress made, question today's challenges, and examine policies currently in effect.

This compilation of essays affords the reader good insight not only into the complexities of immigrant integration, but also into some ethical and moral issues surrounding it. Perhaps most importantly, *Securing the Future* enables the reader to gain a better understanding of the hardships immigrants in America encounter and to empathize with them as friends, neighbors, and colleagues. Reading it made me reminisce about the hardships and challenges I faced growing up as a 1.5-generation immigrant (the term, coined by Ruben Rumbaut of the University of California, Irvine, refers to immigrants who arrived at their destination country before or during adolescence) and feel a kinship with immigrants of any generation.

The book is well organized and a pleasure to read. I recommend it highly to anyone interested in the foreign born, immigrant integration, public policy, or social reform.

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